

District Councillor's Report – Feb 2021

Additional Restrictions Grant Reopens For Businesses In Mid Suffolk

Business owners in Babergh and Mid Suffolk are being urged to explore the range of Covid-19 support grants open to support them through the current national lockdown. The grants cover different periods of national and local lockdown restrictions and are available to businesses with a rateable property who have been mandated to close as part of the national restrictions as well as those who have been significantly financially impacted by lockdown measures.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have also opened phase two of the Additional Restrictions Grant, which unlike the other business grants, is a discretionary grant with criteria and eligibility set by the local authority. This grant is open to non-business rate paying businesses that are required to close such as mobile businesses or those who operate in a shared space as well as other businesses not required to close but who have seen a significant loss of earnings as a result of lockdown restrictions.

Businesses who received the national lockdown grant in November will automatically receive payments for the Tier 4 and current lockdown restrictions as long as their circumstances haven't changed. Any business owner who believes they are eligible but have not been contacted, or who are yet to claim a business support grant, should submit an application form.

Grants that cover the November 2020 lockdown are still open for applications and business owners are being encouraged to check the criteria for all grants as they may be eligible for more than one grant. Applications for the Local Restrictions Support Grants and the Additional Restrictions Grant must be submitted by 31 March 2021.

Joint Local Plan Update

The Regulation 19 Joint Local Plan (JLP) consultation closed on 24 th December 2020. No further points can be made on the JLP following the end of the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission consultation. The Councils must now process, assign and store the duly made Regulation 19 JLP representations in a suitable manner for Examination. The Councils must also analyse, consider and prepare a summary statement of the main issues raised before the JLP is formally Submitted under Regulation 22 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations. The full representations, together with all of the statutory supporting information such as notices and statements, will be published at the Submission stage. This is currently scheduled for late March 2021.

All of the duly made Regulation 19 JLP representations, in full, are to be made available to an appointed independent Planning Inspector, appointed by The Secretary of State, who will conduct the Examination of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. The Examination is conducted in the public domain, meaning that all documents, correspondence and meetings will be publicly available through the Councils' websites. The public can attend any Examination Hearings (which may be virtual or in-person), although only persons and organisations who have made duly made representations to the Regulation 19 JLP have the right to take part in the Examination Hearings. The Inspector will give full consideration to the objections to both the JLP, the supporting Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment

Business Centre Boosts Councils' Income

Property investment company CIFCO Capital Ltd has invested £5.7m in a Basingstoke business centre, so future rental income can be invested back into Babergh and Mid Suffolk's council services. CIFCO, which is wholly owned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, has purchased the business centre, on Winchester Road. The property is set to bring in more than £300k in annual rent from its 14 established business tenants.

The purchase is the latest in CIFCO's acquisition programme, with approximately £75m out of the £100m agreed by councillors invested so far. The remaining funds are due to be invested by the end of March this year—six months earlier than the target agreed by councillors at both Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils last year. The latest acquisitions bring the total number of properties in the CIFCO portfolio up to 18 – and further diversifies its range of tenants to minimise exposure to any one sector, tenant or location.

CIFCO was established jointly by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils in 2017 to generate income through property investment to offset reductions in funding from central Government. Since its launch, CIFCO has brought in almost £4m of net income to the Councils, which has been reinvested into council services.

The returns received from CIFCO allow the councils to meet loan repayments, with extra income on top then ploughed back into council services – at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected other 'traditional' income streams. The virus has affected almost all businesses, however the diverse nature of its portfolio has mitigated the risks and rent collection levels remain above industry averages- with debt repayments to the Councils continuing to be made in full.

New Year, New Homes

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have invested more than £40m buying 250 new homes for low-income house-hunters. This multi-million-pound investment in social housing will see new properties added to their existing council house stock of more than 6,000 homes, or made available to buy as shared ownership homes – helping low-income families onto the first rung of the property ladder.

The homes are being built thanks to section 106 agreements – a condition imposed by the local authority requiring developers to provide a certain number of affordable homes as part of their scheme to help the local community. These properties are in addition to construction already underway on council-owned land. This includes work to transform the former Needham Market Middle School site and the council's former headquarters to provide a further 130 homes.

Garden Waste Collections Suspended Until Further Notice

MSDC garden waste (brown bin) collections were suspended from Monday 11 January 2021 until further notice. This is to enable vehicle crews to prioritise essential waste collections, such as the collection of refuse, recycling and clinical waste. Future invoices will be adjusted to compensate for this period of non-collection.

Housing Delivery Test 2020

The recently published Housing Delivery Test 2020 (an annual measurement of housing delivery in the area of relevant plan-making authorities) confirms that MSDC met the Government's housing delivery requirement over the past three years. This requirement takes into account annual average household growth over a ten-year period, local housing need, and local plan information to calculate the total net homes needed over the test period. Mid Suffolk District Council delivering 103% of its requirement between 2017-2020. It should be noted that this result covers the period 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2020 so much of the disruption to the construction sector during 2020 will be picked up and addressed when reporting the period 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2021 at this time next year.

National results show that 55 councils (including one in Suffolk), failed to deliver at least 75% of the number of homes estimated by the government to be needed in their area over the past three years. These planning authorities will become subject to the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" under the National Planning Policy Framework, meaning they may not be able to rely on their

development plan policies which severely reduces the level of control they will be able to exercise over development in their districts.

Census 2021

Households across Mid Suffolk will soon be asked to take part in Census 2021. The census is a once-in-a-decade survey that gives the Office for National Statistics the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. It has been carried out every decade since 1801 (except for 1941).

The 2021 Census will be the first run predominantly online, with households receiving a letter with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablets. "A successful census will ensure everyone from local government to charities can put services and funding in the places where they are most needed," Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at the Office for National Statistics, said "This could mean things like doctors' surgeries, schools and new transport routes. That's why it is so important everyone takes part and we have made it easier for people to do so online on any device, with help and paper questionnaires for those that need them."

Census day will be on March 21, but households across the country will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March. The census will include questions about your sex, age, work, health, education, household size and ethnicity. And, for the first time, there will be a question asking people whether they have served in the armed forces, as well as voluntary questions for those aged 16 and over on sexual orientation and gender identity. Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, kept safe for future generations.

New Recycling Campaign

A new awareness campaign has been launched in Suffolk to help people get their recycling right. Every year, more than 10,000 tonnes of recycling from Suffolk homes is rejected. This is due to residents placing the wrong items in their recycling bins. This is the same as one in five lorries full of recycling - or 20% of all recycling contents - going to waste. The cost of sorting and disposing this spoiled recycling every year comes to more than £1 million.

The new campaign has been launched by Suffolk Waste Partnership to tackle this problem. The campaign is called 'Together we can get our recycling right'. It includes a leaflet with all the dos and don'ts of what can easily be recycled at home. It also has tips on how to recycle other items that are not accepted in

home recycling bins. The campaign will be promoted on Suffolk Recycling's website and their social media channels.

Regards

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